

Lawmakers raise alarm over 2020 census - Daily World (Aberdeen, WA) - August 15, 2017

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Lawmakers are raising alarm over whether the 2020 U.S. census will be complete and accurate due to a lack of funding and leadership.

Thirty-two Democrats sent a letter on Tuesday to Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, whose department houses the Census Bureau, asking for the rapid appointment of a new bureau director and to ensure there's enough money to complete the decennial survey.

The results of the constitutionally mandated census are used to allocate seats in the U.S. House and direct spending for government programs. Businesses also use census data — which includes detailed demographic information on age, race and income levels — to make decisions about where to sell their products and open stores.

"Lack of leadership, woeful underfunding, delayed testing of new technology, and new demographic challenges lead us to believe that significant action must be taken to get planning and preparation on track to ensure an accurate census count in 2020," according to the letter signed by members of the House, including Carolyn Maloney of New York and Keith Ellison of Minnesota. The letter said there's "no clear leadership" as it enters the "ramp up period" which starts two years before the 2020 decennial census.

In July, the Republican-led House Appropriations Committee approved a bill that included language expressing concern over the status of the census preparations.

Despite those concerns, the Census Bureau says the 2020 survey is on track. In an emailed response to questions, spokesman Daniel Velez said the bureau is "leveraging the best resources and experience inside and out of the government to make the **2020 census** a success." He said the final large-scale test of operations, to be conducted next year, is on track.

The Census Bureau's most recent director, John Thompson, announced his retirement in May, a week after battling with lawmakers over funding, and left at the end of June. President Donald Trump hasn't picked a replacement.

During a hearing in May, Rep. John Culberson, R-Texas, was among members who criticized Thompson for overseeing cost overruns of more than \$300 million amid preparations for the **2020 census**, which will cost about \$12.5 billion. Thompson countered that new data-collection programs, which were meant to be more efficient and less expensive over the long run, had been

underestimated in previous tallies.

The Government Accountability Office in February raised concern about problems facing the census, including the development of computer systems and cost estimates. Completing the decennial census is "one of the highest risks facing the government today," said Robert Goldenkoff, the GAO's director of strategic issues, in an email.

"Although interim leadership is in place, with acting officials in the top two Bureau positions, it's difficult to mitigate risks, ensure accountability, control costs, and produce results," Goldenkoff said."

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